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Red Knot and Horseshoe Crabs: Delaware Bay - the vital link in the West Atlantic Flyway.

Following our successful foray to NW Australia in 1998, six members of Highland Ringing Group were invited to join the 2001 Shorebird Project at Delaware Bay in May.

Cannon-net fire at Sunray Beach, Cape May County *Hugh Insley*

Delaware Bay is a vital link in the West Atlantic flyway for waders that winter in South America and breed in the Canadian Arctic. Each May the bay hosts one of the wildlife spectacles of the world when northbound waders arrive in huge numbers to refuel for the final leg of their journey to the Arctic. Their arrival on the bay coincides with the spawning cycle of vast numbers of Horseshoe Crabs on whose eggs the birds gorge. We recorded weight gains of up to 15 g a day, so that Red Knots arriving lean and fat-free at around 110 g, can climb back up to a take-off weight of around 200 g in about 10 days.

Timing is everything for the successful breeding and population maintenance of these High Arctic nesters, and there is a problem. Horseshoe Crabs, not really crabs but a primitive group descended from arachnids and with chitin shells, have been fished in unsustainably large numbers since the mid 1990s. Female Horseshoes take around 10 years to reach maturity, and a combination of offshore trawling and beach collection has dramatically reduced the numbers successfully coming ashore to spawn. The Horseshoe Crabs are fished (an estimated 3 million a year since 1995) to provide bait for eel pots, the eels being caught mainly for export to Europe. Horseshoe Crabs are also sustainably caught (around 160,000 a year) and released after bleeding, the blood being used to provide lysine for the medical industry. Apart from observing large reductions in numbers and eggs on the beaches, the male:female sex ratio has increased to 17:1 as a result of the fishery. A population collapse with unknown consequences for the shorebirds is widely predicted.

Female Horseshoes, the smaller males hanging on behind, lay fist-sized clumps of eggs about 15 cm down in the coarse-grained quartzite sand of the Delaware Bay beaches. Spawning occurs mainly at night on the spring tides. Later spawning females dig up eggs laid by earlier females - the eggs take 2 weeks to hatch – and these disturbed eggs float to the surface forming a pale green tideline feasted upon by tens of thousands of shorebirds. In the 1980s these egg deposits were reputedly up to elbow-depth in places. During our stay we saw only one good spawning, with Horseshoes on the beach in hundreds, but the strandline was only a thin pale green deposit. Even so, we counted 270,000 waders around the Bay on 22 May this year, a figure confirmed the following day by Cathy Clark's aerial survey team.

Peter Mayhew and Hugh Insley went straight down to Wallop Island, Virginia, the weekend of our arrival to join an International Wader Study Group conference on Red Knot in the West Atlantic Flyway. Speakers from Argentina (Tierra del Fuego) to Canada (Southampton Island), covered all the major wintering, stopover and breeding areas for the *rufa* race of the Red Knot. Sunday morning papers were volunteered and Hugh gave one on HRG's Moray Firth wader studies. The field outing was to Metompkin Island, one of the chain of barrier islands down the southeastern Atlantic seaboard. Lifers started to be clocked up at the rate of 10-20 a day. One of the most interesting species on Metompkin was the federally endangered Piping Plover, a delightful pale grey miniature version of Ringed Plover with dark smudges on either side of a very thin breastband; but the sight of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird whizzing along the dunes moments after we had watched the slow flight of a Bald Eagle across the saltmarshes behind the island was an amazing contrast. There were familiar species too, such as a drake Northern Shoveler flying past in the company of Black Skimmers and Forster's Terns.

Conference over, we headed north with Dick Veitch (New Zealand) and Clive Minton (Australia) to cross Delaware Bay and rejoin the rest of our party at Reeds Beach in Cape May County, where New Jersey Fish and Wildlife had provided a beachfront house for the wader workers.

Jacquie Heaton, Alastair Young, Kevin Peace and Kenny Graham had already spent the weekend there, and thanks to the legendary American hospitality in the shape of local, Sam Orr, had already notched up an impressive list of over 100 species. For our first two days at Reeds Beach onshore winds were unfavourable for either Horseshoe Crab spawning or shorebird catching and we got off to a relatively slow start. However, the wind soon turned, the sun came out and we got down to some serious work. If the Horseshoe Crab fishery, with its very serious conservation implications, is to be addressed, then the fisheries lobby and state politicians have to be convinced: solid scientific data are needed. Our prime objective was to get weight samples at 3 day intervals of at least 100 each of Red Knot, Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstone, so that the rate of weight-recovery could be

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compared with previous and future years as the Horseshoe Crab egg availability inevitably declines.

HRG have a reputation to maintain, so as well as contributing a stream of rabble-rousing crack, which provided instant bonding with the New Jersey volunteers, we had a catching performance to demonstrate. Having helped to make the largest ever catch in NW Australia in 1998, we repeated the effort by making the largest ever Delaware Bay catch, with 730 birds at Fortescue, New Jersey, on 23 May. This excludes around 300 Semipalmated Sandpipers and Dunlin, which were released from the net in the interests of the birds' welfare and so that we could get the full data set from the target species.

Least Sandpiper *Hugh Insley*

The number of birds feeding on the bay is spectacular. When we made that catch there was a minimum of 10,000 birds on the beach. On 25 May we declined a catch when we simply had too many birds packed into the catching area. On that occasion there were an estimated 10 to 15,000 Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone in a flock 6 or 7 yards deep and extending 150 yards along the beach. With a 30 ft net it was hard to imagine that we would have caught less than 2000. We waited for the tide to drop back and the flock to thin out before taking a catch of 400 instead. A large part of our work involved public relations and education, because if this battle is to be won it is likely to be by politics rather than science. Cannon-netting with a participating audience of up to 100 school children, teachers and parents is a surreal experience, but one which thrilled and excited those who took part. 'Awesome' was the word we repeatedly heard.

[illegible] was the easy bit. Once all the birds were carefully extracted and in keeping cages, we set up a series of banding, leg-flagging, processing and colour-ringing teams. The flagging and colour-ringing was a vital way of adding to the data collected - beach scans during our time there revealed many Argentinian and Brazilian marked birds as well as one Red Knot which had been caught at its nest on Southampton Island last summer.

Radio transmitters were fitted to samples of 20 high-weight Red Knot every few days. As well as being essential to help pin down the Arctic breeding areas in June and July, these immediately started to add to our knowledge of the birds' use of Delaware Bay. On the New Jersey side in the daytime the Red Knot were spread along all of the suitable bay shore; at night they all congregated into two huge roosts at Egg Island near Fortescue and Stone Harbour on the Atlantic shore. The number of roadkill Skunks, Foxes and Racoons we saw (and smelt in the case of the Skunks) gave a quick clue to this strategy.

Nightime aerial surveys by Humphrey Sitters located radio-tagged birds from our Fortescue catch at both sites, and those roosting at Stone Harbour were making a round trip of 50 miles. This might seem like small beer to a species that can clock up the equivalent of the distance to the moon in the course of their lifetime migrations. However, it is significant for birds needing to fatten up quickly, in order to get to the Arctic and secure territory as soon as the first ground is cleared by the melting snow, plus raise chicks before the return of the frost and snow at the end of August.

Fish & Wildlife Chief Larry Niles with an Argentine-flagged Red Knot caught at Egg Island, New Jersey

Hugh Insley

We helped to catch 3200 birds in 8 days, working and carousing hard into the night. Our visit coincided with the best warbler fall in 10 years at Cape May. The moon was a recurrent theme, from the distance travelled by some of these Red Knot in their lives to the moon-driven tide cycle influencing the Horseshoe Crabs' spawning.

When the beach conditions were unfavourable we used our cannon-nets to help David Mizrahi with his Semipalmated Sandpiper studies on the back areas of marsh; this had the bonus of enabling us to also handle Least Sandpipers and Short-billed Dowitchers, and we also made a catch of Semipalmated Plovers for him.

On the one day when the tides did not allow catching we had a brilliant introduction to the Pine Barrens with Emile Devito and his Dundee-born wife, Hazel. For the foresters and ecologists among us there was a familiar reflection on the problems of too many deer. In this case White-tailed Deer, reintroduced for hunting in a state where only bow and shotguns are allowed and in places at a density of 60 per square kilometre. Interestingly, like the Forestry Commission in Scotland, they also have settled on 5 per square kilometre as being an ecologically sustainable number and are struggling with a small but powerful hunting lobby to achieve it.

In New Jersey parlance 'we had a blast', and when it fell the 'liquid sunshine' was warm. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to New Jersey Chief of Fish and Wildlife, Dr Larry Niles, for inviting us over to assist with the shorebird teamwork, and to Cathy Clark and Amanda Dey of the endangered species team for smoothing our passage while we were there.

We leave hoping that the work we helped with will make a difference in the arguments for controlling the fishery to sensible sustainable levels. In this way the fantastic spectacle of shorebirds at Delaware Bay in May each year will continue, and the species involved will be able to maintain their populations as a result of the resources available on the bay shore.

Hugh Insley, Kenny Graham, Jacquie Heaton, Kevin Peace, and Alastair Young

Highland Ringing Group members at Delaware bay (from left): Alastair Young, Hugh Insley, Jacqui Heaton, Kenny Graham, Kevin Pearce and Pete Mayhew.

Samuel Orr

The Isle of May and the Kingdom of Fife, June 9-10 2001

Three car-loads of SOC members set off from Inverness on the Saturday morning and met up at Killiecrankie for a cup of tea. We decided to make our own way down to Anstruther via Loch Lindores as a possible stopping place. Our car stopped there and we had a lovely 20 minutes watching Common Coots, Tufted Duck, Common Pochard, Great Crested Grebes with young, Mute Swans with 6 cygnets, a Grey Heron and a Common Buzzard. In the marshy bit at the end of the loch, a Sedge Warbler was flying up in the air then gliding down, singing as it disappeared into the long grass. We also thought we saw a Eurasian Reed Warbler - it was definitely different from the Sedge Warbler. On the way to meet the rest of our party, through a lovely part of the country, we added Chaffinches, Common Blackbird, Common Swift, Rook, Eurasian Jackdaws and Oystercatchers, Barn Swallows, Great Tit, European Greenfinch, Black-headed Gulls and Carrion Crows.

At Anstruther we met up with the rest of our group, with Sylvia Laing joining us too. Ten of us climbed aboard the *May Princess* along with 90 others! You would not think the boat could take so many. As we approached the island, European Shags, Northern Fulmars, Common Guillemots, Atlantic Puffins, Northern Gannets and seals were filling the air and sea – a wonderful sight. A flock of Ruddy Turnstones greeted us as we glided in to the jetty, while Common Eider ducks were quietly watching. The warden met us and explained the do's and dont's of the island, then let us loose for 2 ∫ hours, to wander around, keeping to the tracks. We split up into groups - Sylvia, Brian, Alex and I met Ian from St Andrews Branch, who was delivering the papers and mail to the warden and volunteers staying on the island. We walked up through the tern colony, being attacked by them – you certainly felt it when you got hit! They are mostly Arctic Terns with some Common and Sandwich Terns too. We did not manage to identify the latter – a bit difficult with your hands waving above your head! Ian said that in the fifties only an odd pair nested and now there are 55,000 terns! Puffins were standing guard on grassy outcrops and Eiders were nesting at the side of the path. Ian led us along a narrow path past three dried-up ponds, and past wonderful swathes of Bladder Campion to the cliff edge. There we had brilliant views of Razorbill, one sitting on an egg on a tiny ledge – no nest, just the shape of the egg prevents it rolling off. Common Guillemots, one bridled, and Puffins were perched right on the edge of the cliffs. Fulmars soared past and Gannets were diving out to sea. An amazing place, and of course the noise and smell add to the experience. We meandered back to the main path then on to a second jetty, the original one, and sat enjoying the vista. Shags were nesting all around that bay.

'Bridled' Common Guillemot

Dennis Johnson

Back past more Eiders on nests and Puffins standing guard, a few rabbits ran out of our way and we flushed a Common Kestrel from the undergrowth. We went past the visitor centre - a must for anyone who has never been to the island before - and up onto the headland. By now the sun was out and we got lovely views looking over the firth. The Bass Rock, shining in the sun, rose out of the sea and the whole coastline north and south was clearly visible. We ambled back to the boat through masses of Sea Pink and Bladder Campion. Once on board, the crew did a head count – not once but at least 6 times! The wind had got up quite a bit and it was very choppy as we eased out of the sheltered bay and set off round the island for a last look at the wonderful May Isle. The boat went in close under the very cliffs we had been standing on – lovely rock formations as well as lots of birds. It was a pleasant if undulating trip back to Anstruther, with the evening sun picking up the coastline nicely. Once on dry land, Sylvia left us and we made our way back to the B & B at Edenside, beside the estuary.

We woke to a beautiful sunny day. Alex and Nira were up with the larks and had been along to the hide at Guardbridge on the Eden estuary. They arrived for a delicious breakfast with the news that they had seen a Common Kingfisher. Janet joined us soon after and off we set for Guardbridge! There in glorious sunshine the Kingfisher sat on a stick, then the wall and then a stone by the edge of the water – marvellous. We had 2 telescopes, so everyone got superb views of it. House Martins were flying around the old pillars of a previous bridge after insects – their flying skill is amazing. A Little Grebe dived in and out the mainstream of the river but we all managed to see it in the scopes eventually. A Sky Lark was displaying and in the distance Common Redshanks were probing the mud for beasties. It was lovely and peaceful.

We then set off cross-country to Cameron Reservoir where we walked along the shore, watching Great Crested Grebes displaying. Tufted Ducks and Common Goldeneye were resting on the water, typically near the other shore but with telescopes we could see them fine. A pair of Reed Buntings were calling vociferously, sitting on top of the whins so we got good views of them. We had to have a detour around a huge Mute Swans' nest right on the path but the female took little notice of us. As it is a fishing loch, she obviously was not shy of people. Blue Tits flitted in the pines and a lone Canada Goose quietly swam close to the shore. However, on the way back to the cars, we took a bigger detour round the swan as the male had joined her and was a bit more aggressive! On again in the cars towards the south coast of Fife, we went past Kilconquhar loch and on to Elie. Men in their whites were rolling the sand and setting up a cricket pitch - obviously an annual event - so it was somewhat busy. We retreated and found a wee road going down to the beach and parked at the grassy bend where we had lunch. Northern Lapwings flapped lazily over the field and Sand Martins flew low over the grasses in search of insects. A heronry was in the wood with at least 5 nests – must be a bit noisy and smelly for the people in the houses beside it! We set off for the gravel pits near Collessie and found them, although I was a bit disappointed: the main loch was like Whin Park with Mallard (many obviously cross-bred with domestic ducks), and lots of people sitting on the grass having picnics. Very pleasant but not what I expected. Sadly the man-made tower block for Sand Martins appeared empty. There is a second loch that is the nature reserve but it was closed because ducks and other birds were nesting on or near the path. Because it was closed for the foot-and-mouth outbreak, the birds were not disturbed at the vital times for nesting. I think it was a very good decision to keep it closed until all the birds are hatched. We returned to Loch Lindores to show the others the place. The Common Pochard had 3 young, often resting on the lily pads, and the grebes showed off their striped young too.

Our final port of call was to the reed beds of the Tay near Errol. After a slight detour we found our way down to the reed bed – wow! They are huge and the reeds were so tall as we had a walk through them. Despite coming from Dundee and being involved with the SOC since I was 10, I had never been there! More Sedge Warblers, Blue Tits, a European Robin, Long-tailed Tits and a Goldcrest in the wood that fringes the reeds. We didn't see what we had hoped for – Bearded Tits and Marsh Harrier. We wandered up the track to the car, saying what a pity that we had not seen the aforementioned birds when I suddenly spotted a bird of prey working its way over the field. As it got closer, it was definitely a male Marsh Harrier with its distinctive flight and grey tail and wing edges. What a wonderful sight as we watched it fly slowly over the field to the trees we had just left! Despite odd things going a bit skew-wiff, it had been a very enjoyable weekend with around 70 species of birds seen and extremely amiable company. Thank you to all who came on another trip with me!

Janet Crummy

Sub-specific or non-specific: your next challenge in bird identification?

The publication of the article 'Scottish List – species and subspecies' in the most recent issue of *Scottish Birds* (Clugston *et al.* 2001 *Scot. Birds* 22:33-49) rekindled thoughts I had previously given to the identification of the different subspecies on the Scottish List. In many cases this is not well covered in the standard field guides, so what chance do you actually have of correctly assigning an individual to a particular race?

Subspecies in Scotland

Of the 488 species on the Scottish List, over 180 are monotypic. The rest have two or more distinct forms that often occupy different breeding areas within the total range in which the species is found: these are usually referred to as subspecies or races. Within the latter group there are around 240 species for which only one of these subspecies is thought to have occurred in Scotland. This leaves over 60 species for which two or more races have been reliably recorded in Scotland. It would take very detailed observation to add new subspecies to the existing list, but have you ever considered how easy or difficult it is to distinguish between the subspecies of the group of 60 or so species mentioned above? Some of the races occur only as vagrants. Three subspecies of Dunlin *Calidris alpina* (*alpina*, *schintzii* and *arctica*) pass through in considerable numbers (*schinzii* also breeds in Scotland). Can you separate the two races of Great Tit that occur?

The challenges ahead

Most birders are competent enough at identifying a bird to species level, but how many of you think beyond that? The ease of assigning a race to individuals of the polytypic species mentioned above varies considerably with the species in question. For example, *bernicla* and *hrota* Brent Geese (Dark-bellied and Pale-bellied) are relatively straightforward to distinguish in the field and most County Bird Reports and the *Scottish Bird Report* attempt to list sightings of these forms separately. This is also the case with European and Greenland forms of Greater White-fronted Goose. However, some other species pose a much harder, if not impossible task for separation in the field – who would be confident in deciding between *aalge* and *albionis* forms of Common Guillemot? Both races breed and winter in Scotland, but do you stand an earthly chance of correctly determining which of the two you are looking at away from the breeding colonies?

Why bother?

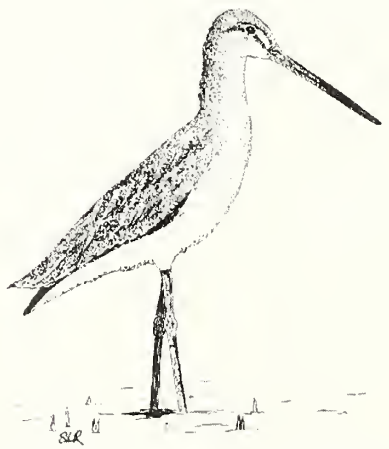
Admittedly many birders' interest in subspecies is confined to those species where a taxonomic split may be imminent, and they can see another tick on the horizon. However, there is a lot more to this idea of identifying birds to subspecies level. The different subspecies will typically originate from separate breeding areas, either in Scotland or elsewhere, as seen with the White-fronted Geese. The impact of climate change in the next few decades on the number and distribution of 'our' birds is open to speculation, but only by attempting to make accurate assessments of the populations now will we be able to judge in the future. Changes in status observed here could be the first indications of major changes on the breeding or wintering grounds – or may reflect expansions or contractions in existing ranges.

There is also the pure challenge of testing your own abilities and seeing just what is possible in the field. Many of the older identification problems are now considered solved, e.g. Green vs. Wood Sandpipers, Marsh vs. Willow Tit, so if you feel you have mastered these why not take up a fresh challenge?

What are the limits?

In many respects, birdwatchers tend to operate to the limit of their field guide. Most show the differences between the various goose subspecies, and the better ones will show such variants as the *sinensis* form of Great Cormorant – a form making a marked inroad into southern England and now turning up in Scotland.

Black-tailed Godwit in winter - race undetermined or actually indeterminable?



Black-tailed Godwit *Stuart Rivers*

Among the commoner migrant waders, Ringed Plover, Red Knot, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit and Common Redshank all have 2 or more subspecies passing through Scotland that potentially can be separated in the field. The problem with this is that the relevant plumage differences are seldom illustrated in the popular field guides – and we are now entering the province of the specialised bird family guides such as published by A & C Black (Helm and Pica) or weighty tomes such as *Birds of the Western Palaearctic*. Even then you may struggle to find the relevant illustration or information. With several of the waders it may be that the possibility of assigning a correct racial identification is confined to those few weeks when breeding plumaged adults pass through. As yet there are few if any suggestions in print for these possibilities and the limits of their reliability. The gaps in our knowledge with certain species such as the larger gulls are probably still quite extensive, but the birdwatching press has already started to cover many of the issues mentioned here. It may be that some separations will remain the province of the ringing fraternity, but the frontiers are being pushed forward.

Give it a try!

So, do not let the publication of the list of bird species and subspecies recorded in Scotland be just an academic exercise that passes you by. Why not rekindle some of your energy and enthusiasm for birds by adopting a new challenge? Look up the article and check out those species and subspecies involved – you may want to ease yourself in gently and start with the ones best covered in your own field guides. Then, next time you encounter individuals of these species in the field, test your new-found knowledge.

Whether or not you succeed in distinguishing between the various different subspecies, you will undoubtedly be looking at the birds a lot harder and that will almost certainly help improve your overall bird identification skills. In addition, when reading up about the different species and subspecies you will undoubtedly increase your understanding and appreciation of just where these birds have travelled from. This heightened degree of knowledge will hopefully make your enjoyment of watching the birds all the greater and, after all, enjoying your hobby is really what it is all about.

Stuart L. Rivers

You find a Greater Sand Plover - three races to consider - oh who cares, you've found a Greater Sand Plover - where's the nearest pub?

Greater Sand Plover *Stuart Rivers*

CONSERVATION NEWS

Red Kite Update

The Red Kite re-introduction enters Phase 3 this autumn, following the success of Phase 1 in North Scotland. After the final release of birds in Central region, the first breeding attempt in Tayside was recorded this year. Evidence of population mixing comes from the North Scotland bird (blue/yellow 'P') which appeared in the Central Scotland release area in the winter of 1997/98. This bird remained here having paired with a Central Scotland bird, breeding successfully in 1998 and 2000, and probably also in 1999. Seven other young kites reared in North Scotland were seen at roosts or feeding stations in Central region last winter

Phase 3 of the Project

In Dumfries & Galloway 33 birds are to be released in August 2001 to start the re-introduction programme there. The origins of these birds are from England (14 birds), North Scotland (12) and Germany (7). This is likely to be a three year project so time to *'keep 'em peeled'* for kites in this area!

All wing-tag sightings are still required, as these are crucial in monitoring the population by measuring recruitment and survival of birds. At least 3 of the 19 North Scotland birds released in 1990 were still alive in 2000! Tags are present on both wings, the left wing bearing an area-specific colour tag since 1996, the right wing bearing a year-specific colour tag. For individual recognition, each tag is also marked with an individual letter, number or symbol. In some years (1992-97 and 1999-2000), coloured bands or bars have been added to the bottom edge of each tag, which has a number or letter (i.e. not tags with symbols). The combination of colours on each tag bar enables individual identification in the field at distances far greater than those at which a number or letter can be read. So, reading tags can be tricky but it really is worthwhile!

Any Red Kites found dead should be reported immediately to the RSPB, so that they can be rapidly collected and taken to a Veterinary Investigation Centre for post-mortem examination. Speed is of the essence.

1 Because of the risk of poison, it is best to leave the body exactly where found. It is especially important to avoid any contact between your bare hands and the carcass. Some of the substances being misused are deadly to humans as well as birds. Please make a note of any visible wing tags present, their position (left or right wing), colour and any numbers, letters or symbols. If you have a camera, please photograph the bird, any suspect bait and the immediate surrounding area.

2 Keep pets away. If possible, cover the kite, any baits or dead animals with vegetation to avoid further deaths.

3 Notify someone immediately of your findings. In North Scotland, contact Brian Etheridge on 01463 715000. Alternatively, call the Species Protection Officer at RSPB Scottish HQ on 0131 311 6500, or telephone your local police and speak to their Wildlife Liaison Officer.

Information from the Red Kite North Scotland Newsletter 2000 (RSPB/SNH), RSPB North Scotland Red Kite Officer and RSPB Scotland HQ.

Grouse Moors and Wading Birds

The *Daily Telegraph* recently (11 August) carried an article regarding the results of a joint RSPB/GCT paper published in the Journal of Applied Ecology earlier this year (A Tharme *et al., J. Applied Ecol.* **38**, 439-457). The article summarises press releases (also received by the SOC) in the context of grouse moor management, the timing of publication coinciding with the start of the Red Grouse season. Entitled, *'The effect of management for red grouse shooting on the population density of breeding birds on heather-dominated moorland'*, the research project covered 320 1 km squares on 122 estates in upland areas of southern Scotland and northern England, where Red Grouse (Willow Ptarmigan) shooting is a widespread land use. This study adopted a correlative approach to disentangle the effects on bird density of habitat differences and grouse moor management. Whilst recognising that an experimental approach to investigate habitat and grouse moor management (heather burning and predator control) is required to determine causation, this form of study is a useful complement to such field experiments and can provide strong indications of possible effects. The analysis was structured to account for variation due to habitat, geographical, geological and topographical variation and to adjust the breeding densities accordingly. Then, testing for any further effect of grouse moor management was carried out on top of this. Any effects of grouse moor management detected would be the strongest indications to date of real effects.

The main thrust of the newspaper article was that European Golden Plovers and Northern Lapwing were five times more abundant on grouse moors than on other moors of similar vegetation composition, where shooting was either absent or at very low levels, while Eurasian Curlews were twice as common. There seems to be a definite effect of management for some species - this including predator-control and rotational burning of heather - and grouse moor management is described the GCT as a *'sustainable land use which helps biodiversity enormously'*. However, some other moorland species, such as Meadow Pipit, Sky Lark, Whinchat and Hooded/ Carrion Crows were less abundant.

It should be noted, however, that these are general statements concealing a great deal of information. One important consideration, of several discussed in detail by the 19 page scientific paper, is that the differences reported are those of overall differences in breeding densities of upland bird populations between grouse moors and non-grouse moors. It was felt by the authors

Table 1. Numbers of breeding pairs and young fledged for the Red Kite release project. Figures given for 2001 are minimum figures (year 2000 figures in brackets). Twelve chicks hatched in North Scotland in 2001 were removed to form part of Phase 3 of the project.

Area	Year of First Release	Total Number Birds Released	Year of First Breeding	No. *Breeding Pairs 2001 (2000)	No. Young Fledged 2001 (2000)
North Scotland	1989	93	1991	31 (32)	77 (74)
Central Scotland	1996	**97	1998	10 (8)	17 (10)
SW Scotland	2001	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

*Figures for breeding birds do not include pairs on territory that did not lay.

**excludes six birds to be released in 2001 following the handover by German police of 13 birds to Scotland. These were allegedly taken illegally from the wild by German falconers who hoped to pass them off as captive-bred. The other seven birds from this group have gone Dumfries & Galloway for Phase 3 of the re-introduction project.

European Golden Plover *E C Fellowes*

that the results for Meadow Pipit and Crow were probably the most reliable because differences were consistent across all four regions where comparisons could be made. For Red Grouse, Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew, density was *not* higher on grouse moors in one of the four regions, but the inconsistent region varied among species.

A further, key aspect of the analysis is that adjustments for differences in habitat variables (and also heather burning) between grouse and non-grouse moors were made. This reduced the magnitude of the differences, though the significance was upheld for all but Sky Lark and Whinchat. However, when regional variables were included with either habitat or heather burning variables, the significance of the differences was upheld for Golden Plover and Crow (in both cases). The paper discusses these and other difficulties in working with such a correlation approach to questions regarding management. To therefore discover any real causal effect of management requires an experimental approach, which would be of great interest and use. The experimental approach has the benefit of controlling many of the variables that are responsible for so-called 'nuisance effects' in studies such as the current one. For example, the region variables included not only the regions themselves but also year and observer variation. By controlling these, and limiting the likelihood of statistical errors (such as false positives and false negatives), we gain a clearer picture of the benefits of management, perhaps leading to the development of guidelines encouraging the adoption of optimal heather moorland management practices. The GCT is carrying out a study to investigate the role of predator control in northern England.

Thus, there are several positive aspects to take from this study. This is a joint publication in a high profile scientific journal, courtesy of the landowners of many estates in Scotland and England. The results for Golden Plover are particularly interesting and in addition, a further experimental study is being carried out. We hope that collaboration will continue and that partnerships continue to develop.

Heather moorland itself is represented in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and the Moorland Association should be applauded for the regeneration of nearly 650km^2 (GCT figures) of heather in England and Wales, in association with agri-environmental schemes. Heather loss on grouse moors is estimated at 24% between the 1940s and 1980s (for those which remained grouse moors during that period). For those after the 1940s that ceased to be grouse moors by the 1980s, this figure is 41%. There has been a long-term decline in heather coverage (mirrored by long-term grouse bag declines) and clearly the grouse moors have had an influence in at least slowing the loss of heather. It seems reasonable that we should expect moorland managers to assess the loss of heather on their land and act accordingly to reverse losses as this should benefit grouse bags. However, all Amber- and Red-listed species should be monitored and further clarification of management protocols interpreted with regard to both biodiversity and sustainable development.

The *Daily Telegraph* article ends with a discussion of the merits of Meadow Pipits (shown to be more scarce on grouse moors) and, almost inevitably the role of birds of prey such as the Hen Harrier. That low numbers of Meadow Pipits (and voles) may be reflected by lower densities of breeding Hen Harriers seems to escape the journalist and one moor owner. The owner would prefer to have more Hen Harriers but have the freedom to control them. However, by controlling the amount of heather moor and grassland the owners may indirectly influence (i.e. reduce) the number of harriers there and ensure commercially viable shooting for many years to come, in the absence of a need to control harriers. We would all like to see Hen Harriers more widespread and free from persecution and if this can be achieved by encouraging lower densities on grouse moors through positive management, then the UK population of Hen Harrier may expand without adversely affecting sporting interests.

Of great importance then, are the recommendations of the DETR UK Raptor Working Group, including developing schemes to improve heather moorland habitat and introducing diversionary feeding. To this end, SNH has just (13 August) launched its Moorland Management scheme at the Forest of Clunie which, it is hoped, will be adopted at other moorland SSSIs. The Moorland Working Group (which includes RSPB, GCT, SNH and the Scottish Landowners' Federation) is in the process of developing a large EU LIFE bid to address a range of moorland management issues to demonstrate that good moorland management is compatible with biodiversity.

Land management in the uplands is a complex issue and sporting interests undoubtedly have helped slow the degradation of heather moorland that has been evident during the last century. We hope that incentives can be offered that will allow the livelihoods of those who subsist on the uplands to flourish, and encourage the diversity of enterprise that appears to be a necessity in the current economic climate. But, this should be achieved in a way that does not unduly depreciate our natural biodiversity assets, the status and health of which is represented by the presence, free from persecution, of those top predators such as birds of prey. In the meantime, we await results of a GCT predation control experiment, an important and necessary step forward in developing the conclusions based on the correlation study discussed here.

Bob Dawson

Volunteer & Farmer Alliance (Scotland)

Local Action for Farmland Wildlife: RSPB launches Volunteer and Farmer Alliance in Scotland

The RSPB has always been aware that the recovery and survival of farmlan biodiversity depends largely on land management practices. In the wake of the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak, there is now wider recognition that land management for both food and wildlife is the way ahead for British farming. The Scottish launch of a project designed to help farmers identify birdlife on their farms as a first step towards better management is, therefore, particularly timely.

The aim of the RSPB Volunteer & Farmer Alliance (V&FA) project is to match up local volunteers with local farmers and initiate personal contact between them. Volunteers, all of whom will (if necessary) receive training in bird identification and surveying techniques, will carry out a free, simple breeding bird survey of the farm, based on three or four, monthly visits. All volunteers will be required to follow the 'Come Back Code' to ensure good relationships with the farming community are maintained during the post-FMD period.

Co-ordinated by a project officer, the survey results are then presented to the farmer as an A3 colour laminated map, produced using a professional mapping programme, and indicating the presence and location of key farmland species. A package of advisory material and contacts for farm-specific advice are also provided to the farmer. Volunteers have the opportunity to gain first hand experience of farming and land management; farmers find out more about the wildlife value of their land and how to improve and capitalise upon it.

Yellowhammer *RSPB Images*

The initial project was successfully piloted in central England; volunteers and farmers were then matched through the rest of England, North Wales and Northern Ireland. Now the expansion continues with the first Scottish V&FA post to be established by the end of 2001, and surveying anticipated to start on farms in 2002. In its first year in Scotland approximately 40 farms will be surveyed, in Stirlingshire, South Lanarkshire, Ayrshire and the Lothians. The work in the Lothians will complement the pioneering voluntary bird surveying project that has already been initiated by Lothians Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group and the SOC.

Experience of this scheme in the rest of the UK has shown that valuable partnership opportunities may arise as many farmers can use the results of the survey to enhance agri-environment scheme applications and support existing conservation management actions. Advisory and conservation bodies in England, such as the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and the National Trust, have supported the project and enhanced the opportunity for positive 'on the ground' action to be taken. Already FWAG Scotland has warmly supported the initiative and it is hoped other land-based organisations will follow suite.

Volunteer & farmer *RSPB Images*

The second stage of the project will be to expand the Volunteer and Farmer Alliance further throughout Scotland, with plans for the next project post in north-east Scotland. In 2002 the RSPB expects to have a project team of 9 personnel, co-ordinating surveys on 1000 farms throughout the UK, with the involvement of over 1000 volunteer surveyors.

Ultimately, as more is known about our local farmland bird populations and those directly responsible for their survival are supported and encouraged to manage the land for both food and wildlife, the Society hopes that the project will contribute significantly to the survival and success of farmland birds in Scotland.

If anyone would like any further information on the Volunteer & Farmer Alliance or might be interested in volunteering for farmland bird surveys, please contact **Sue Agnew at the RSPB South & West Scotland regional office in Glasgow (0141 576 4100) or Peter Gordon at the RSPB Selkirk office (01750 725323).**

Sue Agnew

Concern for Swifts (Scotland)

Two weeks ago I retrieved a dead young Common Swift from a tenement in Glasgow. The erection of scaffolding had prevented the adult Swifts from getting to three nest sites. However, the end result of the renovation will not be detrimental to the Swift colony, as it has now been agreed that I shall inspect the eaves level before the scaffolding comes down, to make sure that lots of holes suitable for Swifts will be retained.

Ensuring suitable nest sites is the focus for Concern for Swifts (Scotland). Many SOC members will be aware of the problems facing these sometimes elusive birds (elusive this year in Glasgow with day after day of miserable weather!). Loss of sites is one problem that we can and must control. Retaining gaps in existing buildings and creating suitable spaces in new ones (e.g. internal boxes in boxed soffits) is very cheap and sustainable, and can be managed without jeopardising building standards. Externally fitted nest-boxes are a last resort, as they are not permanent and may look intrusive.

Public perceptions can be an unexpected problem, as one developer recently wrote: *'The funders have concerns over the prospect of birds screaming around the buildings at fantastic speeds.... This could have a detrimental effect on a private residential development.'* Visions of RAF fighter planes, perhaps?!

One of our priorities is to build up information about where Swift colonies are now, so that conservation measures can be put in place. Edinburgh, Glasgow and North Lanarkshire currently have surveys in progress, assisted by SOC members. These surveys are being used to make Swift nest-site conservation a condition both of new developments and grant assistance for renovation in and adjacent to areas where there are colonies.

Common Swift *Bob Dawson*

So, please keep your records coming in to: **swiftscot@yahoo.com** or, **Concern for Swifts (Scotland), 2/1, 287 Onslow Drive, Dennistoun, Glasgow G31 2QG.** Anyone is welcome to pop in and chat 'swiftly' or ask about Species Action Plan (SAPs) actions. Alternatively, view the SOC web-site.

Clare Darlaston

Scottish Crossbill Update

Still on the books (but how confidently on our lists?), the Scottish Crossbill remains the UK's sole endemic bird species. The latest published research looks at genetic analysis of the crossbills in Scotland (Piertney, Summers & Marquis 2001, *Proc. Roy. Soc. (B)*, **268**, 1511-1517).

As ever, discussions regarding the specific status of *Loxia scotica* are unlikely to diminish. Two genetic methods were used to compare crossbills of the three species caught in Scotland. The birds were separated into Common, Scottish and Parrot Crossbills on the basis of bill depth. However, because of the overlap in this character, selection of birds for the genetic comparisons was based on the published and accepted modal values for each species. Those crossbills with a bill depth less than 10.2 mm were selected to represent Common Crossbill, those with a depth of between 11.3 and 11.7 mm representing Scottish Crossbill and those greater than 13.4 mm representing Parrot Crossbill in the analysis. This compares with published mean values of 10.5, 11.5 and 13.4 mm. Common Crossbills from England (Kielder Forest) and Continental Europe (the Pyrénees) were also included and a sample of Two-barred Crossbill (from Russia) was provided by Bob McGowan at the Royal Scottish Museum.

Common Crossbills in Scotland were sampled from Ballater, the Borders and Glen Tanar, while Scottish Crossbills were sampled from Glen Tanar, Abernethy and Inver. The situation concerning the samples of Parrot Crossbill is intriguing, coming from Mar Lodge, Glen Tanar and Abernethy, suggesting that this species may be reasonably widespread in the Highlands. Comparisons were thus made not only for the three species, but also for a number of populations of each species to look at the distribution of variation within and between populations.

The two methods used – microsatellite markers and mitochondrial DNA – differ in the procedures used but effectively the former is technically more straightforward – more individuals can be processed in a shorter period of time. Thus, 274 crossbills were used for microsatellite analysis (comprising 163 Common, 65 Scottish and 46 Parrot Crossbills), and a sample of 50 birds (18 Common, 17 Scottish and 11 Parrot Crossbills, plus 3 Commons from the Pyrenees and a Two-barred Crossbill) for mitochondrial DNA analysis.

A microsatellite is a specific region of DNA that varies in length in different individuals. This length variation can be measured, and comparisons made in the numbers of different length variants in populations or species. The theory states that groups that are more closely related genetically will tend to have more of these length variants in common. In the study on crossbills five different microsatellite regions were examined. Lots of microsatellite length variation was apparent, but there were no differences in the number of different length variants between the three species, nor between populations of the same species. As such we cannot distinguish Scottish from either Common or Parrot Crossbill, nor Common from Parrot Crossbill using microsatellites.

The mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) approach is somewhat different to the microsatellite approach. DNA is in essence a chain of molecular units (bases), and each of these bases can be one of four types. So when people talk of examining DNA sequence, as they are doing with the human genome mapping program, they are examining the order of these bases. In the crossbills, the order of over 1000 of these bases was examined in 50 different birds. When the orders were compared, the sequences were in most part identical, but a number of differences were seen. This means that there were 33 different versions (*haplotypes*) of the 1000 or so units. Thus, by implication, a number of the versions were shared by several individuals, much like the way a microsatellite band of a given size can be shared by two or more individuals. Again, we have to assume that the birds sampled were not closely related. It would be nice to report that the birds sharing a particular version of the mtDNA sequence were of the same species, but of course *Loxia* life is not so simple! Although some sequences were shared by members of the same species (in two cases by 2 Parrot Crossbills and in a third by 3 Common Crossbills), there are others shared by Common and Scottish (3 versions), Common and Parrot (1 version) and by Common, Scottish and Parrot (3 versions). The remaining 24 versions were observed in one bird only, 10 of them Common, 9 of them Scottish and 4 of them Parrot, plus the single Two-barred Crossbill. Again, we are seeing a pattern of high levels of individual variation. This is emphasised by the statistical analysis then performed on these data, which looked at the actual sequence of the different versions more closely and tried to place them within a 'tree' of relationships based on the differences as represented by the different units. This 'tree' showed that there was no consistent relationship between the DNA sequences of the different species. Ideally, all Common Crossbills would have grouped together on one 'branch', all the Scottish Crossbills on another 'branch' and all the Parrot Crossbills on another 'branch'. Perhaps not surprisingly, many 'branches' comprised a mix of species, and even the distinction between the 'branches' in many cases was weak. The net result was that no significant population structure was observed between the three species, agreeing with the results of the microsatellite markers.

Thus, we have two methods both showing no way of distinguishing the crossbill species genetically. Importantly, we are unable to distinguish Scottish from either Common or Parrot, nor distinguish Common from Parrot, meaning that this on its own does not mean that Scottish Crossbill is any more or less valid a species than either Common or Parrot Crossbill. The discussion of the paper recognises this and therefore considers more ecological possibilities. In essence, consideration is given to the effects of isolation on genetic variation and how this may change over time and when population sizes change.

The discussion begins with the premise that the Scottish Crossbill population remained isolated from other species for several thousand years during the last glaciation (10-27,000 years ago). Breeding densities estimated from the literature suggest a maximum population size of 7500 crossbills, but this would be much lower during periods when the population suffered severe contraction. Indeed, reduction of forest cover to a mere 160 km^2 from neolithic times through the Dark Ages is likely to have had a profound effect on breeding numbers, while modern descriptions of population change suggest fairly wide fluctuations. Thus, it is perhaps a surprise that Scottish Crossbills have maintained a high level of genetic variation (here at both microsatellite and mtDNA level) comparable to that found in the other two species. One consequence of small, fluctuating population sizes is the loss of genetic variation, yet this has not been observed in this study. A possible explanation is that there are high levels of hybridisation with the other crossbills. The authors do not state how frequently this may have occurred, but it is possible that only one successful hybrid pair in every hundred may be sufficient. A greater emphasis on field studies will no doubt provide us with evidence concerning the breeding behaviour of the three crossbill species in Scotland, while continuing to improve our knowledge of the identification criteria and population status and distribution.

The centenary of the formal description by Ernst Hartert of the Scottish Crossbill occurs in 2004 and I wonder how far our discussions will have advanced by then. There seems to be plenty of further papers due for publication that are cited by this study. Until further notice, the Scottish Crossbill remains our sole endemic species of bird. Members of the SOC are encouraged to take an active part in projects regarding crossbills in Scotland, and particularly regarding the status and distribution of the Scottish Crossbill. It may be that we need a tape recorder and computer software for identification, but is this so different from a camera in this digital age?

Bob Dawson

Scottish Crossbill *Ron Summers*

Seabird Studies in Foula 2001

Although 2001 apparently started as a good breeding season with increases in breeding numbers of Arctic Skuas and large tern clutch sizes, it later became an exceptionally poor season in terms of breeding success of many seabirds in Foula. Failure was apparently due to scarcity of sandeels after mid-June. Arctic Terns and Black-legged Kittiwakes suffered total breeding failure, with large numbers of starved dead chicks. Predation and scavenging played only minor roles compared to that of food shortage in 2001. Arctic Skuas, Atlantic Puffins and Red-throated Divers suffered unusually low breeding success but did rear a very few young. Great Skua productivity was reasonable, apparently helped by a high availability of large herring, although the laying dates were slightly later than normal. Overall, 2001 can probably be described as the worst breeding season for Foula seabirds since the depth of the 'sandeel crisis' in 1990. Although sandeels simply appeared to be unavailable to seabirds other than European Shags and Common Guillemots after mid-June, there was clearly a lot of large herring around, and some mackerel. Not only did Great Skuas feed extensively on herring, but also the few food samples obtained from Kittiwakes in 2001 also included herring, which has never featured as a significant item in Kittiwake diet at Foula in previous years.

Arctic Skua *Dennis Johnson*

Red-throated Divers attempted to breed at 11 sites and had 4 chicks likely to reach fledging. Common Eider numbers were very similar to those in 1999 and 2000 but females were remarkably late to move off pools and land into the sea. Arctic Skuas held 116 territories with 2 further briefly prospected territories, but only reared 0.57 chicks per pair to ringing size, most of which were subsequently killed by Great Skuas around fledging. Great Skuas produced 0.7 chicks per pair, feeding chicks mainly on herring, mackerel and gadoid (cod, etc) discards. Kittiwakes and Arctic Terns failed to fledge any chicks, the terns mostly abandoning the breeding colonies by mid-June. Puffins failed to rear more than a very few chicks, with many fluffy chicks dead close to the burrow entrances in early July. Shags did well, with a relatively early and successful breeding season. Guillemots also had a relatively early season. Numbers of loafing large gulls at Foula were exceptionally low, suggesting that opportunities to feed on discards near to Foula may have been poor. Based on only limited observations, Northern Fulmars seemed to have another relatively poor season.

Bob Furness
Glasgow University

LETTERS

Winter Wren feeding tit families in nest-boxes

On 28 May 2000 we noticed a Winter Wren (Wren) carrying food to a nest-box in which a brood of young Great Tits had been calling noisily for food for over a week. The nest-box was within the territory of a pair of Wrens but their nest had not been located, nor had they previously been seen carrying food. Their nests for the previous two years had been located in a woodshed only 10 m from the nest-box tree. After observing several visits it was clear that the Wren, which always approached carrying food items in its bill, was unwilling to enter the box if either of the adult Great Tits was inside, but would fly up to the entrance hole, look in and then retreat if the box was occupied or enter if neither parent was present. On one occasion the Wren made several attempts to find the box empty before entering.

The visits were recorded continuously for 45 minutes between 1400 and 1500 h BST. During this time there were 22 entries by the parent Great Tits, always one at a time, and 19 by the Wren. It was presumed, though not proved, that only one Wren of the local pair was involved. The longest gap between visits by the Wren was 4 min. On six occasions the Wren made more than one attempt to enter but found the box occupied. The total number of approaches to the hole by the Wren was 35, wih 16 abortive attempts.

This degree of persistence by one species to feed the young of another seems very unusual and no reference can be found to this behaviour in Wrens having been previously recorded. Although we could find no evidence of a failed nest in the usual territory of the pair, we concluded that, consistent with the dates and our records for previous years, the Wrens would have been feeding their own young on this date and had presumably lost their own brood. Possible causes were a resident pair of Black-billed Magpies with an active nest 50 m away in the next garden, or such cats from an all-too-numerous local population as dare to face up to our collie (trained to keep our 'wildlife garden' free of cats). The young Great Tits were certainly audible from 10 m away so that the stimulus to any small passerine suddenly deprived of an outlet for the feeding instinct would have been very strong. Just how strong became even more apparent the following day when the same Wren was observed carrying food regularly all morning to the young Blue Tits in another nest-box on a spruce tree about 30 m away from that occupied by the Great Tits. Although this box was not so easy to watch, no failed attempts were noted and the rate of feeding, with a visit every two or three minutes, was perhaps even higher at this box. Feeding continued until at least 1700 h. During these observations on one occasion an adult European Robin was observed to perch within 3 m of the nest-box with a caterpillar in its beak, and appeared to be listening to the calls of the young Great Tits, but it made no attempt to go closer.

Chris Mylne

Great Tit *W E Middleton*

In support of Gamekeepers

After reading the article on page 7 of the June issue of *SBN* about gamekeepers and raptors, I wish to withdraw my support from the SOC.

The societies which are *supposed* to protect all birds quite forget that many song birds of our moorlands have disappeared as a result of the over-population of raptors. If this overpopulation is allowed to continue our moorlands will be unkeepered and revert to vermin and scrub woodland as in years gone by. To my certain knowledge gamekeepers are the greater conservationists of the wildlife of our countryside.

The over-protection of raptors on grouse moors has a knock-on effect to the local economy. I know that on our moor alone five keepers are redundant and many will not be able to keep their tied houses. Also the loss of severance is serious for the owner. Many houses are let to overseas parties and the lack of tenants is affecting hotels and the tourist industry - the chain is endless! Not I have used the words 'over-protection'.

Rosemary Milne-Holme

Ed's Note

The roles of a newsletter such as *SBN* are many. One of these roles is as a means for SOC Council and other committees to tell members about policy details and developments that affect the Club, and also to ask for member input.

Aside from all the official stuff, however, *SBN* is a newsletter that belongs to members – without members' contributions it becomes a very dull read. Thanks to all of you who have taken the time to send your articles in to *SBN* - I hope that everyone else will do so too. The more material we have, the better the final product. Sometimes, we receive material from members that is quite controversial, or expresses opinions that are at odds with what I believe to be true, or which I feel many members will disapprove of too. It is not my job to censor these things, so you may well find things appearing in *SBN* that makes your blood boil. Please remember that articles in *SBN* that have been sent in by members are not official SOC policy! Don't get mad, get even.... I am always willing to accept and give equal space to replies and responses to *SBN* articles. In fact, I encourage them. It *is* my job to make *SBN* informative, interactive and fun. Over to you.

The Four levels of Competence

1 The first level is when birders are 'subconsciously incompetent'. Birders at this level are unaware of their incompetence, can be heard making wildly inaccurate identifications and often hold forth loudly on subjects of which they have but a superficial understanding. They also tend to get the birds' names wrong and will talk about 'pea-eaters' and 'secret ibises', for example.

2 Birders who attain the second level are 'consciously incompetent'. This means they are now aware of how limited their knowledge is and that their identification skills need much improvement. Second Level birders are characterised by their reluctance to offer information during club outings. They shy away from any discussion of a bird's species, and will generally volunteer to scribe at outings so as to avoid having to identify anything.

The third level of competence is when a birder becomes 'consciously competent'. These birders have good identification skills, and are the most likely to want to help Level One birders. Having attained this stage, the Third Level birders are able to pass on useful formulae for the identification of similar species, or for separating the boys from the girls. For example: 'The male Giant Kingfisher wears the waistcoat, while the female has an apron'. With a lot more practice, these birders can become:

4 'Subconsciously competent'. At this level, the learning process has reached its peak. Now a birder is identifying birds effortlessly. Only the briefest glimpse or teeniest squawk is sufficient to accurately name any species in any location. The subconsciously competent birder has no need of formulae or manuals, but can ID birds without conscious thought. Level Four birders are regarded with awe by all other levels. This can sometimes result in these birders adopting a rather stuck-up approach, and they will usually try to avoid Level One birders at all costs.

Contributed by Peter Cunningham, Stornoway, from a correspondence with a South African birder friend.

Do any members out there have their own little formulae for separating species, sexes, songs and so on, much as in the Giant Kingfisher example above? We look forward to hearing from you and will develop a list of such Words of Wisdom! The crests of Red-breasted Mergansers vs. Goosanders might be a good one to start with.

CRESTIE'S CORNER

Photos of Crested Tits required.

Well, you know what they say about baby pictures... Couldn't believe my eyes in *Scottish Birds* 22(1) (p27) but no avoiding the issue. That's me on the right, a scruffy little Herbert if ever there was one. Surely someone out there must have some more flattering photographs. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Ruxton got on well with my old man but these days it's all digital this and that, web-sites and 'burning' CDs. So, any photos or artwork featuring yours truly would be very much appreciated! Having said that, I can preen a little with the fancy overhaul I had last year, now sitting proudly as the logo on SOC 'everything'. I was fond of Mr. Brockie's design and there are still some cracking mugs (oh dear, not the best adjective I feel) and some 'sharp' lapel badges to be had at the SWCF or, failing that, the Annual Conference.

Re-using and Recycling

Here at the HQ we are having a 'greening'. Not that we're at all envious of seeing the latest photos of the Musselburgh Citrine Wagtail, having been slaving away on publications. Oh no, this is all about self-improvement by recycling and so on. And, we hope, this will help the environment. So, we shall be re-using the envelopes that we receive, printing on economy toner for our drafts and records, double-sided copying, plus recycling paper and bottles and so on. It's a shame that Edinburgh Council doesn't have any collection scheme, even for paper. Let's hope that changes in future, so anyone who is able to cart stuff from HQ is more than welcome to drop by but convenience is the key and, if we are using a vehicle for this, we clearly shouldn't be making unnecessary trips! We also like to encourage correspondence by email.

Noreen tells us that there is a company in England that receives our flimsy mailing envelopes for recycling. They do it on a voluntary basis (and it runs at a loss) so it's important that we do our bit by removing all paper labels, sellotape, sticky residue, food remnants (!) and foreign objects, as the plastic has to be melted down first. They also can only accept polythene, so that excludes cellophane, PVC, nylon, PET and so on. There are particular SPI (Society of Plastics Industry) recycling codes (only [2]HDPE and [4]LDPE are acceptable) but manufacturers often don't print these on. Polythene is more 'stretchy' than the other products (which are often more 'glass-clear' in appearance and sound 'crinkly' when touched. It takes approximately 200,000 polythene wrappers to make one tonne of recyclable waste, all of which is hand-sorted by the staff. After being recycled, the polythene can be turned into black plastic bin liners and fertiliser sacks among other things. The company is **Polyprint Mailing Films, Mackintosh Road, Rackheath Industrial Estate, Rackheath, Norwich NR13 6LJ**. Most of the items are received by standard post, so perhaps collections could be made at Branch meetings and then Branches can make a single mailing? In the meantime, any top tips out there for quick and easy removal of labels?!

Christmas is coming...

Gift Ideas

Why not make a gift of SOC membership to a friend or relative, or to someone who you think would appreciate being involved with *'Scotland's Bird Club'*? Contact the **SOC Office for more details on 0131 556 6042.**

'Rusty'

No, we're not talking about those winter wader identification skills, but a charming book released by the BTO about Rusty the Swallow.

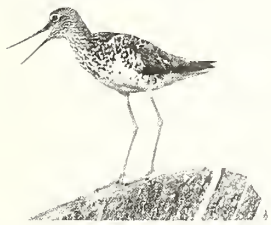
'Rusty Flies South' is an adventure story to be read with the 3 to 6 year olds, with vivid illustrations by Sally Bell. Telling the story of Rusty the Swallow's journey to South Africa, it has been written by Graham Appleton of the BTO to raise funds for their Swallow Appeal, to be launched in August 2001. The book is available from **BTO Swallows, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU**. It costs £5 including p&p.

We say our fond farewells to most of our Swallows this month, and many will get as

far as South Africa: ring number P590687 travelled 10,552km to Cape Province last winter, since being ringed at Dingwall - the Highland Ringing Group's furthest Swallow recovery but only by 2 km!

One to get

In June, RSPB Scotland launched a new wildlife film at Thurso Cinema: *'The Undiscovered Country: The Wildlife of the Scottish Flows'*. This is the first major film that the RSPB has made for some time, and was three years in the making. The film crew, in their efforts to capture portraits of Black-throated Divers, Common (Black) Scoter and Common Greenshank, were also dive-bombed by a Hen Harrier and reported by vigilant local people as suspected egg thieves. **Copies of the film are available for £9.99 (add £2 p&p) from RSPB Forsinard (01641 571225) and RSPB North Scotland Regional Office (01463 715000)** as well as local retail outlets. Also at the launch, RSPB announced a 2300 hectare extension to their Peatlands Reserve in Caithness & Sutherland, a purchase supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, EU LIFE Nature programme and RSPB Members.



Common Greenshank *RSPB*

One to avoid?

Many SOC members may have watched the recent TV series of *'Clarissa and the Countryman'*. A book accompanying the series is available but references therein to issues regarding predators are highly disconcerting. This is because many assertions made are blatantly false or are contrary to current evidence. The level of ignorance displayed would be laughable, were it not representing such a degree of intolerance for raptors. This book should have been a wonderful opportunity for edification regarding the role of country pursuits in conservation. However, given an apparent prejudicial bias in instances where the true facts are well known, we can be forgiven for doubting the truth of its greater content. Dealing with Red Grouse (presumably at Langholm), the authors state that after five years of the study there were no grouse remaining - clearly at odds with spring densities after 5 years of over 40 grouse per km^2 in 1996! At every opportunity, predators from Otters to Peregrine Falcons are lambasted as *'vermin'*. One wonders what is the objective of the book: is it hysterical ranting, or a calculated effort to drive further a wedge between the two sides of any debate regarding predators, thereby disrupting conservation efforts made by responsible parties?

Anyone wanting an objective appraisal of the impacts of birds of prey, and a wider consideration of problems facing gamebirds is encouraged to buy the *Report of the UK Raptor Working Group*. This is available from SNH at Battleby priced £10. It is beautifully produced, easy to read and essential reading for anyone with an interest in the debate.

Apologies

Apologies to Fred Wescott and Hugh Harrop for the poor reproduction of their photographs in *SBN* 62 of Grey Heron and Eurasian Scops Owl respectively. We are working closely with the printers to ensure that this problem does not recur.

NOTICES

A Guide to Bird Watching in the Clyde Area

A flyer announcing this new publication accompanied the June mailing. This sturdy 'ring-bound' volume is produced by the SOC Clyde Branch, with sponsorship from RSPB, SNH and the Glasgow Natural History Society. Copies are available for £10 (plus p&p) from **Cliff Baister, 20 West Chapelton Avenue, Bearsden, Glasgow G61 2DQ. Tel: 0141 942 2421**.

Scottish Ringers' Conference

The 2001 Scottish Ringers' Conference will be held at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie, from 23-25 November. Further details from **Bill Taylor, 42 Birkenhillock Road, Forbeshill, Forres, IV36 1FH. Tel: 01309 671818 or email to Bill at: w.g.t.@btinternet.com**

BTO Regional Reps

David Wood, RR for Argyll (South) has added the Isle of Bute and the remainder of mainland Argyll except Morvern to his area of responsibility. **Drovers House, Bellanoch, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8SN. Tel (H) 01546 830272 (W) 01546 603611; email puffinus@stormie.idps.co.uk**

Richard Evans, RR for Argyll (North) including the Isle of Mull is now RR for Mull and Morvern. **East Croft, Lochdon, Isle of Mull, PA64 6AF. Tel: 01680 812430; email rjevans6@freeuk.com**

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Peregrine Survey re-scheduled

The 2001 survey was postponed because of the foot-and-mouth epidemic. In discussion with the many funding organisations and participating groups the survey has been rescheduled for 2002. Forms and instructions will be sent out to all those people involved in due course. In the meantime, we have to hope that the long 'tail' of the epidemic is soon docked, as there is considerable concern regarding a possible resurgence of the disease in the autumn. Our sympathies go out to all those affected by the outbreak.

Surveying our Breeding Birds – You Can Help!

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) has been developed to take over from the Common Birds Census (CBC) as the main tool for monitoring common breeding bird numbers in the UK. Since 1994 the two schemes have run side- by-side in order to ensure that interpretation of future BBS trends can be made with regard to previously collected CBC data. 2000 was the last year in which the CBC was run, although it has to be said that Scotland's representation was poor. There are over 2200 BBS 1 km squares in the UK, which are randomly selected, thereby giving greater and more even coverage than the CBC. There are 631 allocated squares in Scotland and in 2000 246 were covered. Some squares are 'uncoverable' but there are 350 currently 'up for adoption'. Squares are available in all parts of the country, particularly in parts of the north-west. Each is a 1 km square visited three times (once for habitat description). Mike Raven of the BTO has kindly passed on data for Scotland since 1994 and we will present this in the next *SBN*. A summary of results (to 1999) also appears in the 1999 *SBR* that accompanies this issue of *SBN*.

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Fair Isle Bird Observatory Report No. 53 (2000). *Eds. Deryk & Hollie Shaw. 112 pages, 17 colour plates (includes one wedding!)*

A total of 203 species recorded, with highlights being Britain's second Brown Shrike, Scotland's second Dartford Warbler, a near record productivity for Arctic Terns and the first breeding of Corn Crake on the island since 1966! There are a number of short articles, including causes of death in wild birds, trip durations of Northern Gannets and the decline of Black-legged Kittiwakes on Fair Isle as well as more personal accounts of experiences. Over 7000 birds were ringed, including a healthy 1415 Arctic Tern chicks and the Brown Shrike, while recoveries included a European Storm-petrel inland in Switzerland (sadly moribund) and a Horned Lark colour-ringed in Norfolk. The report costs £6.50 (£8.50 overseas) and is available from the observatory: **Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland, ZE2 9JU, web-site at www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk.**

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Proposed new format for *Birding Scotland*

Birding Scotland's new format journals are to be mailed twice a year and will double the size of the current issues i.e. 96 pages with 16 pages in colour. They will be produced in a larger size (167 x 245mm) and will be perfect bound with a flat spine and a heavier card cover. The larger, more flexible journal will allow a more efficient use of colour and will also enable the development of a consistent structure whilst retaining the same content and variety of articles.

BIRDING SCOTLAND

Birding Scotland was established to encourage country-wide communication, to offer a platform for readers' views to be aired and to keep them in touch with the Scottish birding scene by providing a more comprehensive look at the occurrence of migrant and rare birds in Scotland. It also publishes notes on identification, rarity finding, general birdwatching and site guides along with articles to enhance and encourage birding in all regions of Scotland.

To receive a free sample back issue of *Birding Scotland*, please send an A5, 45p SAE to **H. Scott, 51 Charlton Crescent, Aboyne, Aberdeenshire AB34 5GN**. To subscribe, send a cheque for £18.00 (made payable to H. Scott) with your name, address and telephone number to the address above.

Lochwinnoch RSPB Nature Reserve Second-hand Natural History Book Sale

We are pleased to announce what will be the largest second-hand natural history book sale to be held in Scotland in 2001. The book sale, to be held on Sunday 16 September between 10 am and 4 pm at the reserve visitor centre, will coincide with an optics demonstration. All-in-all, a good birder's event!

There will be a wide selection of titles suitable for both the amateur and the expert, at very reasonable prices. We intend to sell rare or scarce books by auction. The sale will continue until Sunday 23 September or earlier, depending on when all the stock is sold. We hope this will be a successful venture, with profits going to the RSPB's vital conservation work. Hope to see you there! For further information, please contact **Joan Shaw on 01505 842663, Fax 01505 843026 or e-mail joan.shaw@rspb.org.uk Lochwinnoch RSPB Nature Reserve, Largs Road, Lochwinnoch, PA12 4JF.**

SOC NOTICES

THE CASE FOR THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

Over the last year, Council has been addressing the twin issues of bringing the Club into the 21st century and creating a sound platform for both the future employment of staff and a possible move of premises. The loss of Sylvia Laing as Secretary in April brought these points into sharper focus. Accordingly, Council has reviewed its aims and objectives and set out a Vision Statement for the Club over the next five years. As you will read elsewhere, it was decided to recruit a Development Manager to progress these initiatives, and the Club Vision provides a benchmark for the success of the Club in the coming years. The Club Secretary will now become an honorary post and the role restricted to secretarial duties for Council and Management Committee. There will be an increased focus on the Branch network and the Local Bird Recorders.

Effectively, we now have a Business Plan for the development of the SOC in the medium term. Council will continue to review club policy to further define and achieve this plan.

To effect these changes, amendments to the Club Constitution are required. These are detailed in the Agenda for the 2001 AGM enclosed with this mailing. Much of the change is to introduce more flexibility into the constitution to enable the Club to react more quickly to changing circumstances.

A key foundation for the change is the rewording of paragraph 2 of the constitution to detail the Club's 'aims' rather than 'objects'. This defines why the SOC exists. It is thought that there is now no requirement to list our 'activities' in the constitution, as these will inevitably change over time according to circumstances. Council believes that the SOC should cater for everyone interested in Scotland's birds, and that the success of the club is dependent on both the network of SOC Branches and the recording of birds through the Local Bird Recorder structure.

To progress these views, Council recommends that its management committees are re-structured. At present, Council consists of the office bearers, the honorary president(s), ten elected members, representatives from each of our 14 Branches and up to five co-opted members, giving a possible total of 33 members attending a Council meeting. With a meeting of this size and make-up it is difficult to focus on the key issues and provide speedy decisions, and there is insufficient time to address issues or discuss initiatives raised by the Branch representatives. In recent years, there has been a decline in attendance of Branch representatives at Council meetings, reducing the opportunity for SOC members to feed their thoughts and ideas into Council.

It is therefore proposed to:

1 Reduce the number of members on Council to nine elected members, plus the honorary president(s), and co-opted members. Council will continue to be the decision making body of the Club, but Council meetings will be re-structured to focus on matters of policy, strategy and constitutional requirements. As well as the officers of the Club, there will be two representatives of the Branches (see below) and three members elected at the AGM to serve on Council for three years (rather than five years).

2 Create a new Regional Committee where all Branches can be represented. This will provide a forum for the sharing of successes and problems Branches face, and it is anticipated that this will increase communication between Branches. The creation of the new Regional Committee recognises the importance of the Branch network to the SOC. Two members of this new committee will sit on Council to ensure the views of Branches are fully represented.

3 Increase the prerogative of Council to create new committees to handle specific areas of Club activity. Currently proposed are a committee of local recorders, a committee to organise Club conferences, an IT committee and a committee to oversee the proposed Avifaunas project.

Council believes that this new structure is better able to achieve our stated aims. Wider use of email will be made to assist effective communication between members of all committees. All committees will be asked to clearly document their roles and responsibilities and will be encouraged to provide regular updates on their activities to the Club membership through SBN.

The proposed changes to the constitution are important to the future of the SOC and all members are therefore encouraged to attend the AGM in October to participate in the vote on their acceptance. Copies of the current constitution will be made available in the pack given to conference delegates, or can be obtained in advance by writing to 21 Regent Terrace requesting a copy. The constitution is also displayed on the SOC website (use the index under Search/A to Z Index).

Mark Holling on behalf of Council

Recorders' Conference

The postponed Recorders' Conference will now take place on Saturday 24 November 2001. Interested groups should contact Ray Murray with information about expected number of delegates by email to **Ray.d.Murray@ukgateway.net**. Recorders, Assistant Recorders, Bird Report Editors and members of club and Branch committees and of local records committees are encouraged to attend. An agenda will be sent out by September.

Annual Conference

The conference starts with registration at the Balavil Sports Hotel on Friday 26 October 2001. We are hoping that the mix of speakers will be every bit as stimulating as last year, with the theme being the birds that visit our shores from abroad, either in summer or in winter. A Moroccan connection is expected for talks by Chris Rollie (RSPB) and Phil Whitfield (SNH) regarding Ring Ouzels and Eurasian Dotterel, while seabirds will be represented by Bob Furness (Glasgow University) and Jim Reid (JNCC *Seabirds at Sea* Team). Wildfowl also feature strongly, thanks to presentations by Bob Swann (RSPB) and Malcolm Ogilvie.

The Conference is the Club's main social event and an excellent opportunity to enjoy a popular meeting, make new friends and develop contacts. Plus, of course, you can ask questions of the speakers and help develop the lively discussion that is a feature of the weekend. In addition, all are encouraged to attend the AGM of the Club. With the appointment of the new Office Manager and Development Manager, the Club is entering a new and exciting phase to which we can all contribute.

SOC Discussion Group Meetings

All members are invited to join the monthly SOC Discussion Group which meets on the first Wednesday of the month from September to April in the Waterston Library of the SOC at 21 Regent Terrace. The meetings are chaired by Mark Holling and start at 7.30 pm. The flexible agenda covers mainly surveys and local conservation issues. Much of the local SOC and BTO fieldwork is planned here and feedback after surveys is a key element of the meetings. We always break for tea, cakes and informal chat, and conclude with a 'Round Table' to give attendees a chance to report recent sightings.

Dates for the 2001-02 session are as follows: 5 September, 3 October, 7 November, 5 December, 9 January, 6 February 6 March and 3 April. Please note the later date for the January meeting, owing to the Hogmanay holiday!

200 CLUB

Winners in the second quarter of 2001 were:

April 1st £50 – I. T. Craig, Falkirk; 2nd £30 – Mrs N. I. Stabler, Inveresk; 3rd £20 – Mrs M. C. Lawrie, Troon; 4th £10 – Mrs E. M. Russell, Kippen.
May 1st £50 – T. Shannon, Dumfries; 2nd £30 – Miss M. M. C. Woolgar, Edinburgh; 3rd £20 – Miss J. E. Wilcox, Edinburgh; 4th £10 – Miss J. R. Davidson, Edinburgh.
June 1st £30 – Miss S. M. McCulloch, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 – D. B. McGinn, Inverness; 3rd £10 Dr G. H. Harper, Edinburgh.

There are a few places still to fill to complete 200 members for this 'year' which started on 1 June. Please help us to maintain our target number of 200. Any member over 18 can join for the rest of the 'year' by sending a cheque for £6, payable to 'SOC 200 Club', to **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire, TD6 9NH. Tel: 01896 822176**. It will be gratefully acknowledged.

Local Recorder Position Vacant - Fife

Dougie Dickson is resigning as local recorder for Fife from 31 December 2001 having held the post for 17 years. No replacement is yet named. Does anyone have an interest in this important recording role, working closely with the Fife Bird Club in the production of the Fife Bird Report? We take this opportunity to thank Dougie for all his efforts over the years and are pleased to note that he will freely assist in handing over to his replacement. Anyone interested in the position should contact **Stewart Neilson, Fife Branch Chairman Tel: 01333 429 785**.

Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report

Peter Norman is the new editor for the Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report. The 1999/2000 combined report is now out, available direct from Peter at **Low Boreland, Tongeland Road, Kirkcudbright, DG6 4UU.** Back numbers of the Report since 1985 are also available from **J .E. Howie, 60 Main Street, St John's Town of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3UW.**

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REVIEWS

Lomondside. *John Mitchell. HarperCollins. 2001. 232 pp. ISBN 0-00-220146-1. £19.99 (pbk)*

The landscape of Loch Lomond is undoubtedly the jewel in Scotland's crown. This scenic beauty has attracted many visitors over the centuries and inspired generations of naturalists and ornithologists. Few have stayed long enough to get behind the scenery and develop a real insight into its unique natural history. John Mitchell, a long-time SOC member, is one of these rare people. It is just over 200 years since Rev. John Stuart (1796) published a bird list for Luss Parish, the first for any part of Loch Lomond. Another one hundred years were to pass before John Lumsden (1895) published a comprehensive natural history of Loch Lomond. One hundred years on from Lumsden, it is with impeccable timing that John Mitchell has produced the latest synopsis of the natural history of Loch Lomond. It is perhaps surprising that the *New Naturalist* series has only now turned its attention to Loch Lomond, 55 years after the series was started. However, for this we should be grateful, as I am sure that any earlier attempt could not have been as authoritative or comprehensive as this one. For the last four decades John Mitchell has worked, lived and breathed Loch Lomond. There can be few square metres of the 800 km^2 of the Loch Lomond drainage basin that he has not been to. With the well honed skills of an all-round naturalist he set about exploring and recording the area's wildlife. His diligence for recording observations and communicating widely with other enthusiasts has enabled him to develop a comprehensive and well informed picture of what makes Loch Lomondside tick.

In this book, Mitchell chooses to describe Loch Lomondside, the entire drainage basin rather than just the Loch. This covers an area from Crianlarich to Milngavie, and from Garelochhead to Carron Valley Reservoir. The subtitle 'Gateway to the Western Highlands of Scotland' captures the essence of Loch Lomondside, where the Lowlands meet the Highlands, accounting for the extraordinary diversity of landscape, land use and ecology found there. The book is divided into four sections. The Physical Environment includes an introductory overview, describes the underlying geology, the shaping of the landscape and the climate. This is followed by a second section, that outlines the influence of man, from prehistoric to the present, focusing on land uses. The third section describes the wildlife habitats, communities and species. This section is subdivided into four broad habitats each with a chapter, covering: the loch and its surrounds, the lowland fringe, deciduous and coniferous woodlands, and muirs and mountains. The final section catalogues the myriad efforts to conserve Loch Lomond, its scenic beauty and wildlife, dating back more than a century and looks forward to the creation of Scotland's first National Park.

For the birdwatcher this is a comprehensive account, although a checklist would have made a useful appendix. Classic highland birds such as Red-throated and Black-throated divers, Whooper Swan, Golden Eagle, Rock Ptarmigan, Eurasian Dotterel, Common Greenshank, Osprey and Western Capercaillie are all described in their settings, as are typical lowland species such as Rook, Northern Lapwing and Barn Owl. Most readers will find a few surprises such as breeding records for Black (Common) Scoter and Temminck's Stint, which highlight the unpredictability of the area, and provide an eternal challenge to the birdwatcher. Birds are dealt with in each chapter as components of the relevant habitats or land-use under discussion. These are succinct but based on extensive survey and recording. However, by reading all of each chapter the birdwatcher will gain a detailed insight into the ecology and land-use of Loch Lomondside. For example, the Ruffe, a fish introduced by accident, has spread rapidly to dominate the fish fauna, leading to a change in the diets of Grey Heron and Great Cormorant, and the rapid increase of Goosanders at spawning time; increased nutrients and colonisation by Canadian pondweeds have led to increases in the breeding population of Mute Swan. These are just two of the many gems presented, illustrating the dynamic nature of the study area and the influence of man's activities. They also demonstrate the depth of understanding that can only be gained by methodical study and monitoring. This book is a testament to both.

The author traces the inspiration for this book back to a series of extra-mural classes he organised for Glasgow University in the early 1970s. These inspired more that just John. As a schoolboy, my embryonic interest in natural history and ornithology was harnessed and given strong direction when I attended a course of classes he tutored then. I am one of many who were inspired to seek out the secrets of Loch Lomond. The *New Naturalist* series sets out to present in simple language to the lay reader the results of recent scientific work in the many fields covered by the general term Natural History. It recaptures the spirit of the old naturalists whose keen delight was in the study of animals and plants in their native haunts. In this volume, John Mitchell has achieved just that. The text is straightforward and packed with information that flows easily and logically, making a comfortable and stimulating read. With 113 black-and-white text photographs and 16 colour plates, mostly by the author, this is well illustrated for readers who are unfamiliar with the area. Unfortunately, the reader will need to sit with a series of OS maps to get the most out of the text, as there are no maps identifying even

the main settlements of the area. My only other minor criticisms are that there is no comprehensive bibliography or any appendices with checklists. These would be invaluable to readers wishing delve deeper into the subject, and to pick up the myriad of leads provided for further study. These additions would also help the next John to come along a hundred years from now to write the next natural history of Loch Lomondside. This is a classic, which will endure for the next hundred years. Get your copy today; they are going fast!

Chris Waltho

Thrushes. *Peter Clement and Ren Hathway, with additional illustrations by Clive Byers and Jan Wilczur. Christopher Helm, London, 2000. 463pp, 60 colour plates, maps and many black-and-white illustrations. ISBN 0-7136-3940-7. £35 (hardback).*

Helm Identification Guides have become a byword for excellence. This new guide, covering all 162 species of the world's true thrushes, is no exception, and is one that I have been awaiting eagerly. The familiar format of extensive introduction, plates and species accounts makes this much more than just an identification guide. Fifty-five pages of introduction give general notes on classification, voice, behaviour, history, conservation and the future. The 60 plates are superb, showing most plumages as well as small distribution maps. Those (sadly very few!) species with which I am familiar are instantly recognisable. What a pity, then, that my copy showed our own Blackbird with a bright pink bill and eye-ring! (*Mine's fine - Ed.*) I would also like to have seen an illustration of the distinctive female of the North African subspecies *mauretanicus*.

The 267 pages of species accounts tell the reader all he or she wishes to know and are the result of many years of research and observation, often on obscure tropical forest thrushes of which some are very poorly known. Included are the three recently extinct species. Each account describes the plumages in full, with identification notes that include those of confusion species. This is followed by geographical variation, voice, status and distribution, covering all subspecies. Paragraphs on movements, habitat, behaviour, breeding moult and measurements then follow, terminating with a short list of references for further reading.

Errors are very few. Methods of measurement for bill length are confusingly inconsistent; bill tip to skull in some, to base of feathers in others. For example, bill length of male Blackbirds is apparently some 20% greater than that of females! Such criticisms are somewhat unjust, however, and in no way detract from this highly recommended book.

Norman Elkins

Iconografia degli Uccelli d'Italia (Iconography of Italian Birds) Vol III. *Eds. M Spagnesi & L Serra, plates by U Catalano – Instituto Nazionale per la Fauna Sylvatica*

This is a truly magnificent production. There is a set of loose-leaf plates (69 x 35 cm approx.), mostly one plate per species, and an accompanying book (bilingual text in Italian & English), all enclosed in a box. The book includes information about conservation status for each species, and maps of breeding and/or wintering distribution in Italy for all except occasional visitors. Despite being entitled volume III, this volume, covering Cranes to Woodpeckers, is the first to appear: two further volumes dealing with non-passerines will appear over the next two years, followed by one or two on passerines. The intention is to cover all birds occurring in Italy. It has been sponsored by the Italian Ministry of the Environment and carries no price: it is not clear if it is available for sale at all. However it is held in the Waterston Library (as is a companion volume on mammals), and is well worth a look next time you are passing Regent Terrace.

Birds of Britain & Europe with N Africa & the Middle East. *Heinzel, Fitter & Parslow ISBN 0-00-219894-0. Collins, £9.99 (pbk)*

This is new edition of the well known field guide originally published in 1972. Many of us will have battered copies of earlier editions and it remains handy for stuffing in a pocket on trips. When it first came out it set the standard, but many feel that it has now been overtaken by the *Collins Bird Guide* (Mullarney et *al.*). Collins also still have Peterson et al. in print. It is all a matter of personal choice.

Birds of Britain & Ireland – a guide to identification & behaviour. *D Couzens ISBN 0-00-711112-6. Collins, £9.99 (pbk)*

And here is yet another – no-one could accuse Collins of ignoring the birding market! This one first appeared as the *'Wings' Guide to British Birds* in 1997 and, besides the customary identification/distribution pages (4 birds to a spread) with drawings by Norman Arlott, has interspersed sections on behaviour, etc.

Birds of the Cayman Islands. *P E Bradley ISBN 0-9074423-X. BOU, £35*

BOU checklist no 19 follows the customary form, including some excellent photographs of birds, and of the topography of the islands. There is a lengthy introduction which includes comments on current local conservation issues. Clearly worth consulting if you are going to the Caymans.

John G Davies

RECENT REPORTS: June to early August 2001 - a review of Summer 2001

The two main events of the summer were the influxes of **Common Crossbill** and **Rosy Starling**. In a record showing, sixteen of the latter were found between 7 June – 4 August on Shetland (5); Orkney (1); Outer Hebrides (2); Highland (3); Aberdeenshire (3) and Angus (2), whilst the **Common Crossbill** invasion took place from mid June continuing into August. The largest numbers, probably thousands, were on Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides. Fewer were noted on the mainland, though an influx was evident on Speyside where very few crossbills of any 'species/type' had been present earlier in the year. Proving that the influx was coming from Scandinavia (and possibly Russia), three **Two-barred Crossbills** were discovered; a female on Fair Isle on 5-9 July, male at Spiggie (Shetland) on 22 July and a juv male on the Isle of May on 27 July – 3 Aug. Small numbers of **Common (Mealy) Redpolls** were also seen on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay in late July whilst an **Arctic Redpoll** was reported on Fetlar (Shetland) on 11 June.

Two red male **Common Rosefinches** were seen in July on North Ronaldsay and Unst though the poor spring for scarce/rare passerines did not really improve much in early June – often the best period in Scotland. Seven **Marsh Warblers** were reported, all typically on Shetland, apart from a singing bird at Spey Bay on 14 June (only the second record for Moray). Amazingly, the only **Icterine Warbler** reported this spring was on North Uist on 10 June (with nearby a **Rustic Bunting** seen on Grimsay the same day). The merest hint of north-easterly on the 16 June brought a singing **Red-throated Pipit** (remaining to 18th) and a male **Black-headed Bunting** to Fair Isle but, apart from that, the totals for scarcities in the first fortnight of June were as disappointing as those for May i.e. two **Bluethroats**, two **Red-backed Shrikes**, up to two **Eurasian Golden Orioles** (on Shetland) and a ***thunbergi* (Grey-headed) Yellow Wagtail** (on Unst on 17th). More exciting was the discovery of a first summer male **Citrine Wagtail** at Musselburgh Lagoons on 22-24 June, to the delight of many. It was the third spring record for Scotland and fifth ever in Lothian. A **European Bee-eater** was seen on Shetland, at Lunna from 10-21 July; whilst in the North Sea a first summer **White-throated Sparrow** was on a fixed oil vessel c130 miles due east of Aberdeen on 6 June.

The star seabird of the period was also seen in the North Sea, a **Black-browed Albatross** feeding around a fishing boat for over an hour 50 miles NNE Fraserburgh on 13 July (presumably the same bird responsible for sightings in July off Holland and Norway and

in May off Kent and Sweden). It was a very good period for seabirds generally. There were at least twelve reports of **Cory's Shearwater** between the 6 June - 4 August all, apart from two off the Outer Hebrides, from south-east Scotland including, for the third year running, a lingering bird off Kinghorn Harbour (Fife) on three dates in July. That an individual of this species should hang around long enough to be twitched must be particularly galling to those who plied their trade in the 1970s and early 1980s when the species was almost always outnumbered by **Great Shearwater**. 22 **Sooty Shearwaters** were reported from 8 July, mostly from the Outer Hebrides, and seven **Balearic Shearwaters** were seen from 22 July, all, apart from one off Fife Ness on 3 Aug, in Ayrshire and the Outer Hebrides. The 25 **Pomarine Skuas** reported from the 7 July is a good early autumn showing whilst there were very good numbers of **European Storm-petrels** about in the North Sea as evidenced by over 100 being tape-lured and trapped at Fife Ness during July. Large numbers were seen feeding off Kinnaird Head (Aberdeenshire) e.g. 165 in ∫ hour there on 30 July. In eight hours on 7 July 377 **European Storm-petrels** were counted passing the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory (Argyll) – a record count for the site. There were some very notable **Leach's Storm-petrel** records from the east coast also, with one trapped at Fife Ness overnight on 14 July (only the eighth ever for Fife) and up to six reported off Kinnaird Head between 16 July – 6 August. Also on 6 August, an adult **Sabine's Gull** was reported at Tarbat Ness (Highland) whilst other gull highlights of the period included three **Ring-billed Gulls** reported, three ***michahellis*** **'Yellow-legged Gulls'** (two in Fife and one in Aberdeenshire) and an impressive fifteen **Mediterranean Gulls**. **The** find of the period though was definitely the adult **Whiskered Tern** at Meikle Loch (Aberdeenshire) on 27-29 June, then at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg on 30th before being seen again at Meikle Loch on 1-2 July. With there being almost 130 accepted records in Britain for Whiskered Tern it is surprising that this is only the second Scottish record, after one shot in Nithsdale, Dumfries-shire on 29 May 1894. Three adult **White-winged Terns** were reported in July: on Orkney, in Dumfries and Galloway and the second ever for Argyll – on Tiree on 14th, [illegible] a **Black Tern** was on North Ronaldsay [illegible] July.

[illegible] great month for waders this year; [illegible] to distinguish between the spring pa[illegible]ding and the autumn one beginn[illegible]. An adult **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was at Uyeasound, Unst, on 16 June (third record for Shetland) whilst a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg on 6-7 June was the forerunner to three others in July/early August on Orkney. Other June highlights included a summer-plumage **Grey Phalarope** off Ardvule Point, South Uist, on 3rd, two migrant **Red-necked Phalaropes** on Orkney and in Kinross (with another at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg on 1 July), fifteen **Wood Sandpipers**, four **Temminck's Stints** (with two different birds then seen at Musselburgh Lagoons in early July), three **Little Plovers** (with two in July at WWT Caerlaverock) and ten **Curlew Sandpipers** which were then followed by an impressive fifteen further adults in July. **Green Sandpipers** also showed up well with 35+ seen from the end of June whilst a good passage of *islandica* **Black-tailed Godwits** on 25 July included 69 at Musselburgh – a Lothian record count. In early August two adult **White-rumped Sandpipers** were seen - at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg on 3rd and on the South Ford, South Uist on 3-4th.

A **Great Egret** at Tyninghame on 21 June was only the second Lothian record after one at the same site in 1840. A female **Red-footed Falcon** on North Uist from at least 24 June - 9 July was only the third Outer Hebrides record. The immature **White-tailed Eagle** of Norwegian origin remained on Shetland until early July. Four migrant **European Honey-buzzards** were reported in July and amongst the small scattering of **Eurasian Hobby** reports were regular sightings of at least two birds on Speyside throughout the period. Rare wildfowl are not normally associated with midsummer but June especially bucked this trend. A female **Canvasback** on Loch of Rummie, Sanday, on 11 June was presumably the bird seen there last June; a drake **Black Duck** on Loch a Phuill, Tiree, on 15 June will be the first for Argyll if accepted, and a drake **Lesser Scaup** at St John's Pool on 23 June is the fifth record for Caithness. The only **King Eider** reported was the female in the Forth, at Aberlady, until 23 July at least, then at Leven from the 3 August. Finally the rarest bird on Fair Isle in the period was the **Mute Swan** from 6 July – only the 6th island record.

Angus Murray

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Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club was established in 1936. Now in its 65th year, the SOC has 2250 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur bird watchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

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